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Philo of Alexandria

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I. Introduction: Philo and His Project

The Jewish exegete Philo of Alexandria's (c. 20 BCE to c. 50 CE) debt to Plato is enormous.[*] Philo's central project, the allegorical interpretation of the five books of Moses in the Septuagint, would be inconceivable without the contribution of the Athenian philosopher, and Greek culture in general.[1] Philo's relation to his two-fold heritage has given rise to debates for centuries.

Before we look at the different ways Philo utilizes Plato in his project, it is warranted to briefly outline his enterprise. Most of his ca. 40 surviving works, written in Attic-influenced Greek, deal with interpreting the Pentateuch and belong to one of three different commentary series.[2] (1) In the *Quaestiones* (sc. *in Genesim* and *in Exodum*) Philo goes through the biblical text verse by verse presenting questions about the meaning, and answering both on the basis of the literal and then concerning the allegorical interpretation. The *Quaestiones* is probably the series he wrote first.[3] (2) Almost half of Philo's works belong to what is called the *Allegorical Commentary* (on Genesis). The literal meaning is here mostly just the starting point for allegories of often considerable complexity the main subject of which is the human soul. There are signs (e.g., references to initiates) that this series was intended for a select audience only.[4] (3) The third series, the *Exposition of the Law*, is the most exoteric one, and it covers parts of all the five books of Moses focusing, in particular, on the creation, the patriarchs and the injunctions of the Mosaic Law. Typical of the first two subject areas is the alternation of rewritten biblical stories and their allegorizations.

The remaining handful of works consist of philosophical, historical and apologetic writings, many of considerable interest (e.g., Philo's retelling of the life of Moses in two books). Almost 25% of the corpus has survived, apart from some Greek and Latin fragments, only in a sixth-century Armenian translation, and perhaps one-third has been lost altogether.

Philo's treatises differ from Plato's in many ways. His works contain little narrative material, and we find nothing comparable to the Socratic irony in Philo.[5] His two dialogues, the *De animalibus* and the *De providentia* II, are quite unlike Plato's.[6] They focus on a thesis rather than a topic and consist of fairly long speeches of argument and counter-argument. The method of Socratic questioning is absent.

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[*] I thank David T. Runia for his valuable comments on a draft version of this essay. All the remaining infelicities are exclusively my responsibility.

[1] For Philo's education and his use of Greek literature, see, e.g. Koskenniemi (2014) and the references there.

[2] For a good introduction to Philo's works and their classification, see Royse (2009). His corpus is of the same order as Plato's. Sometimes the different books of certain Philonic treatises are counted as separate works, which raises the total to c. 50.

[3] See Terian (1991). The allegory in the *Quaestiones* is often quite unelaborated when compared with the later series.

[4] See, e.g., Burnett (1984), 449-50.

[5] E.g., the mocking of Egyptian religion in *Decal.* 79-80 would be an apposite passage for sarcasm, but we find Philo simply calling for horrification and pity as the appropriate reactions to animal worship.

[6] For these, see Terian (2008), who sees Philo relying on parts of the *Phaedrus* in *Anim.* (see pp. 276-81).

1) *Philo's Relation to Plato in Historical Perspective*

That Plato was for Philo a major reservoir of both philosophy and language has been recognized since antiquity. The first surviving reference to him, by Josephus, says he was "not inexperienced in philosophy" (*AJ* 18.259). The church historian Eusebius tells us that in addition to mastering all of Jewish theology Philo was "related to have surpassed all his contemporaries, especially in his zeal for the study of Plato and Pythagoras" (*Hist. eccl.* 2.4.3).[7] Jerome for his part is the first one to record the proverb, "Either Plato philonizes or Philo platonizes" (*De viris illustribus* 11.7).[8]

How the relationship of the two thinkers was seen in Byzantium and the medieval period in the West has not been much studied until recently.[9] The *bon mot* continued to be circulated.[10] In some Philonic manuscripts there are marginalia critical of clearly Platonic ideas, even omissions of passages that contain them.[11] Yet Philo was still an "honorary Church father."[12] His allegorical method did receive criticism, e.g., from Martin Luther, but this was not connected with his Platonism.[13]

During the 16th century the accessibility of Philo's works increased as they began to be printed. The connection between the Philonic *allegory* and Platonism could be seen more clearly, which caused criticism.[14] Among the many assessments of Philo's Platonism we may mention the one by the important and skillful editor of Philo, Thomas Mangey.[15] He crystallizes his view in the foreword to his 1742 edition of Philo's *oeuvre* in the form of a selection of Platonic doctrines in Philo as follows: the ideal of assimilation to God, the notion of the creation of the world in accordance with the invisible ideas, the pre-existence of souls and reincarnation, the tripartition of the human soul and the four cardinal virtues as well as the notion that the stars and the world itself are living beings. His judgment is that Philo "does not show himself to be so much an interpreter of Moses but a pupil of gentile philosophy, principally a devotee of Plato's."[16]

The 19th and 20th centuries saw Philo's Platonism contextualized, as he began to be seen as part of a larger whole now called "Middle Platonism." John Dillon has shown that Philo provides us

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[7] Philo has little reception history within Judaism between Josephus and Azariah de' Rossi (see below). After the former, the reception and transmission of Philo takes place among the Platonist church fathers beginning with Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

[8] On this saying, see Runia (1993a), 313-5.

[9] See now Runia (2016).

[10] It is cited with implicit approval by the patriarch Photius in the 9th century (*Bibliotheca*, cod. 105). Also the Byzantine scholar and statesman Theodore Metochites (d. 1332) is familiar with it, but he rejects it saying that Philo did not match Plato (*Semeioseis gnomikai* 16.2). The first Jew to write in the 1570s a comprehensive assessment of Philo, Azariah de' Rossi accepts the saying (2001), 111. Like Photius (but for different reasons) he has doubts about Philo's orthodoxy, but neither of them links this with Philo's Platonism (*idem*, 158).

[11] E.g., the MS. Monacensis Graecus 459 contains many such scholia by a 15th-century hand (see Cohn et al. [1896], 1.vi-vii for quotations). Philo's heavily Platonizing *locus classicus* on reincarnation in *Somn.* 1.137-139 is carefully omitted in this 13th-century ms. On this passage, see below, n. 50.

[12] Runia (1993a), 31.

[13] Luther (1895), 560. The details of the reception of Philo, and its possible dependence on that of Plato, by the different parties of the Reformation are to a large extent an unexplored territory. The same applies to Eastern Christendom, at least as far as studies published in the West are concerned.

[14] Important works critical of Philo were Petavius (1745) (published originally in 1643) and Fabricius (1693). The former was a Jesuit, the latter, a Lutheran.

[15] For a perceptive overview of other evaluations, see J. L. Mosheim's essay-length footnote in Cudworth (1845) (appeared originally in 1678), 320-33. Mosheim's view is that "the primary and fundamental doctrines of Plato are expressly put forth" by Philo (p. 321). See also Billings (1919), 1-12.

[16] Mangey (1742), vii- viii; my tr.

with good evidence for this phase of Platonism with its Pythagorean, Stoic and Aristotelian influences.[17] Yet there is no consensus of whether Philo, given his exegetical orientation, should be called a Middle Platonist, and, if so, in what sense. For example, although Dillon characterizes Moses, as interpreted by Philo, as "a great Middle Platonist," he does not consider Philo a philosopher in his own right.[18]

The key question regarding Philo's dual orientation is if he pursues "exegetical philosophy" or "philosophically orientated exegesis," i.e., ultimately, whether it is Plato or Moses who carries the day in Philo's thought.[19] Both views have had their defenders. David Winston has argued that Philo could just as well have written philosophical tractates on biblical themes, but that he chose the form of scriptural commentary in order to convince his audience that the philosophical ideas that abound in his allegories are embedded in the Pentateuch.[20] In Winston's view the "midrashic/allegorical character" of Philonic exegesis also allows a considerable amount of *eis*-egesis, reading things *into* scripture, which is why it is misleading to call Philo primarily an exegete.[21] The counterpoint, represented, e.g., by David T. Runia, is that Philo simply "discerns fundamental Greek philosophical assumptions within scripture itself" and that despite Philo's debt to Greek thought "he [often] speaks of God with spirituality quite different in flavor to that found in the works of Greek philosophers."[22] We will return to evaluating these positions in the last part of this essay.

2) *Philo's References to Plato and Socrates*

When we try to establish what Philo thought of Plato, we have two sets of sources: the direct characterizations and the way in which Plato's thought is actually used (for which see below). There are a total of 23 instances of the name Plato in the Philonic corpus.[23] What is common to these (with one exception) is a positive attitude. Plato is also many times referred to anonymously, ranging from "one of the ancients" (*Her.* 181) to just "someone" (*Spec.* 2.249). The name of Socrates—the only historical person of significance for Philo in Plato's works—is mentioned less often than Plato's.[24] While Philo may speak of Socrates without mentioning Plato, the former does not have a clearly distinguishable voice of his own. The reference to "a man highly esteemed, one of those admired for their wisdom" in the context of a rare, explicit quotation from *Tht.* 176ab in *Fug.* 63 could mean either, but the more likely referent is Socrates.[25]

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[17] Dillon (1996), 439. Philo is discussed in this book, which originally appeared in (1977), on pp. 139-183 and 438-441.

[18] Idem, 439, 143.

[19] The distinction in the form quoted is from Runia (1986), 544.

[20] Winston (1981), 2-3. He compares this to Plato's using the "teasing dialectic" of the dialogue form.

[21] Winston (2005), 15.

[22] Runia (1993b), 128; 1986, 541. The latter point is also brought up in Dillon (1996), 143.

[23] *Opif.* 119, 133; *Prob.* 13; *Contempl.* 57, 59; *Aet.* 13, 14, 16, 17, 27, 38, 52, 141, *Prov.* 1.20-22, 2.42, 52, 56; *QG* 1.6, 3.3; *QE* 2.118. (For *Prov.*, the numbering is for Aucher's edition of the Armenian.) For concise overviews of Philo's references to, of and quotations from Plato, see Runia (1986), 366-70 and Sterling (2014), 138-9. The *De aeternitate mundi* and the *De providentia* belong to the philosophical treatises, to which the *Quod omnis probus liber sit* should be added, which differ from the majority of the Philonic writings in the degree of openness of references to Greek sources.

[24] There are eight instances in total: *Somn.* 1.58; *Contempl.* 57; *Prov.* 2.8, 24 (2.21 in PLCL), 42; *QG* 2.3, 2.6, 3.3. A few of the references are to Xenophon: Paramelle (1984) gives *Memorabilia* 1.4.12 and 1.4.6-7 for the references in *QG* 2.3 and 2.6, respectively. When referring to *Phdr.* 246e in *QG* 3.3 Philo speaks of "the Socratic Plato"—an expression used before him by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*De Demosthenis dictione* 3.8 and *De compositione verborum* 16.22).

[25] Philo mentions Socrates' being admired for his wisdom in *Plant.* 80 and *Prov.* 2.8. Cf. also Xenophon, *Mem.* 4.2.3 and *Tht.* 161c where Socrates uses the same expression (although not of himself). For the deviations from the received Platonic text in this and twenty-one other Platonic citations in the Philonic corpus, see Runia 1997.

One case of naming Plato is particularly interesting. Does Philo really call him "the most holy" (ἱερώτατον) in *Prob.* 13—an epithet usually reserved to Moses? This reading of a single manuscript was accepted by Mangey and Cohn; the other mss. have λιγυρώτατον.[26] The passage contains citations from *Phdr.* 247a and 243d. Colson's observations about the scene of the dialogue as λίγυρος (230c) and the Muses as λίγειαι (237a) are relevant, but do not explain why *Plato* would be called "most musical" or "clear-voiced," as he renders. I think the answer lies in the relation of the cicadas (which Philo actually mentions in §8) and the Muses to *the art of speaking well*; see esp. 258d-262d. Philo is using a *Phaedrus*-inspired adjective to praise Plato's style.[27]

There is one place in Philo's works where Plato himself is subjected to what may be called criticism. In his laudatory description of the monastic community of the so-called *therapeutai* and *therapeutrides* Philo makes it a point to describe their "convivial meals as contrasted with those of other people" (*Contempl.* 40), also the *Symposia* by Xenophon and Plato (§§ 57-64). Philo describes both banquets as "matters for derision," if compared with those of the Therapeutae (§58). Xenophon's are briefly described as occasions for merry-making, whereas Plato's get more attention with pederasty at its center. While the practice is denounced in strong terms (§§ 59-62), Philo treats both authors in a noteworthily delicate manner, calling them "men whose character and discourses showed them to be philosophers" (§57).[28] The criticism is carefully targeted at their judgment of the symposia as being "models of the happily conducted banquet" (*ibid.*) but even this criticism is left implicit. Plato's references to pederasty do not, on the whole, seem important for Philo, let alone a hindrance for using the philosopher's ideas.[29]

It has been suggested that Philo so rarely mentions Plato's name in his exegetical treatises because he wanted to avoid the obvious.[30] This may be part of the explanation. Regardless, the phenomenon should be seen in light of a more general avoidance of name-dropping.[31] As for Plato in particular, giving a reference each time to a Platonic idea or expression was utilized would have been highly impractical, given Philo's constant use of the philosopher as a source of both major notions (e.g., the creation of the universe according to an intelligible model) and a plethora of terms and images. It is also worth noting that Philo's text can be read without knowledge of his sources, but that if these are recognized, a new level of interpretation appears as the *contexts* of the borrowings dawn on the audience.[32]

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[26] Runia (1997), 276 calls for "very serious consideration" for this latter reading as *lectio difficilior,* whereas Sterling (2016), 37 argues in favor of the former as the more difficult reading.

[27] That a scribe might substitute "most holy" is understandable, if he did not know the *Phaedrus* and in light of the fact that the reference to Plato in §13 is substantially connected to the reference to "the saintly company (ἱερώτατον θίασον) of the Pythagoreans" in §2.—Interestingly, *Prob.* 13 also seems to contain a retort to Aristophanes who in the *Clouds* portrays the door of Socrates' "school of thought" (φροντιστήριον) as locked (ll. 132-183); cf. Philo "wisdom . . . never closes her school of thought (φροντιστήριον)." Philo is the first author after Aristophanes to use this word and does so only here.

[28] There are inaccuracies in Philo's criticism, in particular with regard to the distinction between popular and heavenly love introduced in Pausanias's speech (181c-185e). See Colson's notes *ad loc.*

[29] It remains unclear whether Philo knew the condemnation of homoerotic behavior in the *Laws* (e.g., 636c, 838e). He does use partly similar language (see *Abr.* 135; *Spec.* 2.50, 3.37, 39; *Contempl.* 59, 62) but does not appeal to Plato.

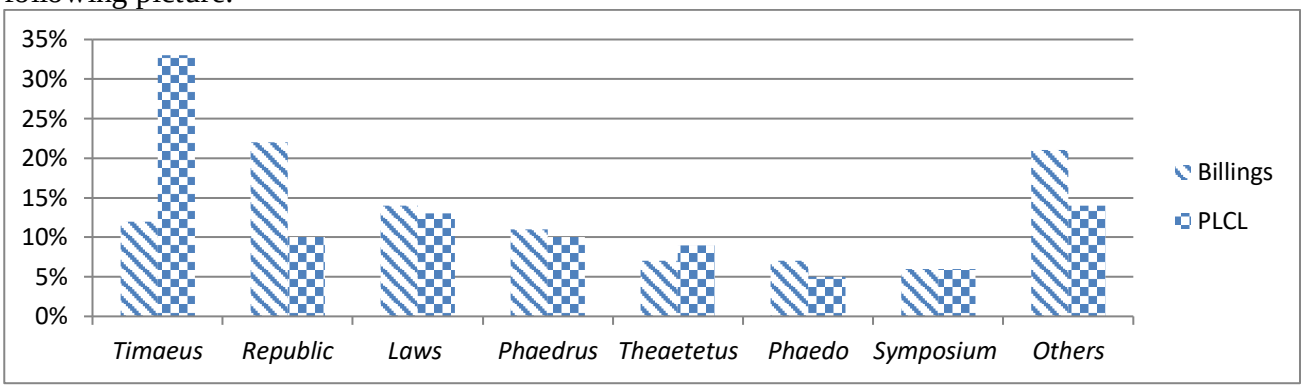
[30] Runia (1997), 270-71. However, Philo several times anonymously alludes to Socrates in a way that presupposes no knowledge of him (*Deus* 146, *Plant.* 65) or the *Apology* (a reference to 21d at *Plant.* 80).

[31] E.g., Homer is mentioned by name only once in the *Allegorical Commentary* (*Conf.* 4), whereas the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* are referred to almost 30 times.

[32] Philo's use of Plato's reincarnational texts is an excellent example. Philo is reluctant to explain the tenet openly, and his veiled references to it can (and continue to) be read ignoring the original contexts of their Platonic elements. See Yli-Karjanmaa (2015), 111-27.

3) *The Corpus Used*

There are large differences in how frequently Philo uses Plato's various dialogues. Comparing the 700 references to Plato's works in Billings' 1919 work on Philo's Platonism with the c. 200 in the notes of the first ten volumes of the English translation of Philo's *oeuvre* in the Loeb Classical Library PLCL), and looking at the seven dialogues whose average share exceeds 5% we get the following picture.



With the exception of the *Timaeus* and the *Republic* there is fair convergence between Billings and the Loeb edition, although the differences in approach mean that the comparison is suggestive only. In total, Billings refers to 25 dialogues, the PLCL to 15. In Runia's grand study on Philo's use of the *Timaeus*, the top six non-Timaean dialogues are the same as above with the exception that the *Statesman* replaces the *Symposium*.[33]

The frequency of usage naturally varies according to subject matter. In Méasson's monograph on Platonic images and myths in Philo special attention is given to the *Phaedrus*, which, together with the *Timaeus*, constitutes almost 60% of her references, the top seven being the same as in Runia.[34] In my own study on Philo's position on reincarnation the four dialogues clearly referred most often to make up 92% and consist of the *Phaedo* (34%), followed by the *Timaeus*, *Phaedrus* and *Republic*.[35]

II. Philo's Use of Plato

The primary forum where the interplay between Philo's Judaism and Platonism can be observed is his allegorical exegesis. Plato's division of reality into a lower, mundane and sense-perceptible sphere and a higher, heavenly and noetic one is of fundamental importance for Philo. In addition, the Alexandrian cuts and pastes freely from different dialogues both specific expressions and more general imagery that pleases him. This method makes it virtually certain he had committed large portions of Plato's works to memory, for we cannot assume that, when a single sentence of Philo's contains language from several dialogues, this is the result of consulting several scrolls.[36]
Admittedly Philo also deviates from Plato in points of doctrine. Lists of such deviations have been presented by, e.g., Goodenough and Runia.[37] The lists do not have much in common but both, on

[33] Runia (1986).
[34] Méasson (1986).
[35] Yli-Karjanmaa (2015).
[36] So also Dillon (1996), 140.
[37] Goodenough (1946), 106-7; Runia (1986), 512-3.

questionable grounds, include a major tenet, reincarnation.[38] That Philo could not accept the idea of human souls being born in *animal* bodies is clear, because his anthropology differs from Plato's in the direction of Aristotle and the Stoics: animals do not possess νοῦς, which for Philo is the primary term for the rational part of the soul.[39]

It is time to see in practice how Philo blends Plato with the Bible in his allegories by looking at what Philo says of Gen. 6:2 in *Gig.* 6-18. The biblical verse runs, in Philo's Bible, "Now when the angels (ἄγγελοι; the LXX has ὑιοί, 'sons') of God saw the daughters of humans, that they were fair, they took wives for themselves of all that they chose."[40]

Runia has analyzed the structure of Philo's allegorical treatises and made important observations.[41] He gives the structure of *Gig.* 6-18 as follows:[42]

(a) §6 citation of the main biblical lemma, Gen. 6:2
(b) §6 *initial observation* (angels, demons, Moses)
(c) §7-16 *background information*
(d) §17 *proof* of doctrine secondary biblical lemma Ps. 77:49 [mode of transition verbal ἀγγέλους => ἀγγέλων πονηρῶν]
(e) §17-18 *detailed allegorical explanation.*

The "initial observation" (b) runs, "Those whom the philosophers designate 'daemons,' Moses is accustomed to call angels. These are souls that fly in the air."[43] This statement, which orientates the audience away from the pre-diluvian context, is a part of a set of notions which Philo repeats, with some variation, in the context of no less than five different biblical texts.[44] The underlying scheme is that there are souls found in the element air, just like each of the other elements has its creatures, and some of these souls undergo incarnation—the foolish ones repeatedly in *Somn.*—while others, i.e., the angels, do not. This scheme is exposed to view to different degrees in different treatises. The idea that souls or daemons (or heroes in *Plant.*) are in the *air* Philo has probably been appropriated from Pythagorean or Platonist sources.[45]

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[38] Goodenough's justification is merely Philo's "Jewish foundation." Runia sees Philo replacing reincarnation with allegorical explanation. For a critique of his position, see Yli-Karjanmaa (2015), esp. 20-25 and 120-22.

[39] *Opif.* 73; *Deus* 45, 47; *Anim.* 85. For Plato νοῦς is not an essential part of the human being and can occur also in animals (*Ti.* 51e, 92c), whereas Aristotle considers it possible that it can be separate from the soul and immortal (*De anima* 413b25-28, 429a22-26, 430a22-23). According to Koester ([1995], 270) the view that the animals are devoid of νοῦς is a Stoic doctrine.

[40] Tr. New English Translation of the Septuagint.

[41] Runia (1987). See also Runia (1984), esp. pp. 238-44. A brief summary: In his allegorical treatises Philo, as a rule, goes through a series of *main biblical lemmas* (MBL). He often makes some initial observation to "break open" the verse in question and may give some background information before embarking on his actual allegory. He very often uses other biblical texts, *secondary biblical lemmas* (SBL), to explain the main one. These are linked with the MBL by a common word, or a theme, or both, and there is thus a verbal or thematic *mode of transition* (MOT). Usually Philo returns to the MBL before moving to the next one. For a recent application of these observations, see Geljon & Runia (2013), esp. pp. 10-20.

[42] Runia (1987), 133.

[43] Tr. Winston (1981) as all quotations from *Gig.* (with occasional modifications). For a commentary, see Winston & Dillon (1983).

[44] These are, in addition to *Gig.* 6-18, *Plant.* 12-14 (Gen. 9:20), *Somn.* 1.134-141 (Gen. 28:12) and the little more distant parallels in *Conf.* 174-177 (Gen. 11:7) and (part of) *QG* 4.188 (Gen. 26:8).

[45] See Alexander Polyhistor's compendium of Pythagorean teachings at Diogenes Laertius 8.25-35 and Augustine's reference to the views of the Middle Platonist Varro in *City of God* 7.6. The notion can also function as an "attempt to systematize" various Platonic and Platonist views concerning incorporeal souls, as Runia (1986), 254 sees it. See further,

Runia's point (c) concerning §§ 7-16 seems to call for further analysis. I think the section should be seen in the light of Philo's *solution* to the awkward biblical statement concerning angels:[46] Philo explains them as pleasure-oriented human souls (§§ 17-18; cf. §§ 19-20). But are §§ 7-16 "background information" only, yet "necessary for the allegory"?[47] The section unfolds the scheme of the airy souls which takes over once Philo encounters the word "angels." The inclusion of air as the location of the souls is instrumental: it leads to the exposition of each of the four elements being the home of the creatures appropriate to it (derived from *Ti.* 39e-40a). Philo reinforces this by also alluding to the requirement in 41b that heaven is not imperfect: "For the universe must be animated through and through" (*Gig.* 7, elaborated in §§ 8-11).[48]

In *Gig.* 13 Philo proceeds to the human souls' incarnation and utilizes the Timaean image of the body as a river (*Ti.* 43ac). From the descent it is logical to continue to the ascent, but Philo has no use for Plato's mythical "native stars" (42b), so he changes dialogues and speaks of the souls' returning to their starting point, their correct philosophizing and their practice of dying to the bodily life (§§ 13-14) utilizing both the *Phaedrus* (248e-249a) and the *Phaedo* (67de, 80e).[49] In §15 Philo returns to the wicked who have "never had a vision of the truly beautiful," again echoing the *Phaedrus* (e.g., 247cd, 248bc, 249de). The section closes (§16) with a statement that souls exist in good as well as bad variety: the bad "angels" are not worthy of the appellation, whereas the real ones act as mediators between God and humans—an allusion to *Smp.* 202e.[50]

At §17 Philo introduces as "testimony" the secondary biblical lemma, Ps. 78:49 (77:49 LXX) which mentions "wicked angels."[51] What Philo now supports with this text is the initial observation, reiterated in §16, of "angels" meaning souls.[52] Only after this does Philo proceed to the actual allegorical interpretation based on the result he has reached, "wicked angels = bad souls."

The contents of the cento are in no way based on the main biblical lemma, only triggered by it.[53] §§ 7-16 are thus more than just background information, but whether they are necessary for the

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Runia (1986), 229 and Winston & Dillon (1983), 197-200. Méasson (1986), 405 speaks of a hypothetical, possibly fragmentary "commentaire du *Timée* par le *Phèdre*." However, the *variation* in the mixtures of Platonic elements in the parallels (see n. 50) strongly points to the direction of Philo's own creativity. Similarly Runia (1988), 292.

[46] Nikiprowetzky (1983), 11 puts it like this: "Mais alors comment peut-on entendre que des *anges de Dieu* aient *épousé* les *passions* des hommes?". Passions is the interpretation of the "daughters" of Gen. 6:1 (*Gig.* 5), and it would be better not to juxtapose this *explanatio* with the following *explanandum* ("angels").

[47] Runia (1987), 122, in a general description of Philo's exegetical procedure of providing background information.

[48] Winston & Dillon (1983), 240-41 refer, as parallels to this section, to passages in *Ti., Lg.* and also *Ax.* In §12 Philo makes as statement on (real) angels, for which they point to *Smp., Plt.* and *R.*

[49] This is an example of how Philo turns a blind eye to a reference to pederasty. Plato writes in *Phdr.* 248e-249a: "For each soul returns to the place whence it came in ten thousand years [and not before] . . . , except the soul of him who has been a guileless philosopher or a philosophical pederast"—for whom reincarnation only lasts three thousand years.

[50] The *Smp.* passage is also drawn on in *Plant.* 14 and *Somn.* 1.141. The latter treatise features a Platonic cento which is even denser than the one in *Gig.*, for in the space of c. 70 words in 1.137-139 Philo, in his most explicit description of reincarnation, manages to make identifiable references to *Phd.* 66c, 68b; *Phdr.* 246c; *Smp.* 211e and *Ti.* 41d, 44b as well as including other notions for which clear counterparts exist in these dialogues and *Cra., Grg.* and *R.* See Yli-Karjanmaa (2015), 130-43.

[51] Philo can be very selective in his use of a biblical lemma. Here its context and most of the contents are ignored.

[52] The return to the initial observation is reminiscent of Philo's habit of eventually returning to the main biblical lemma. Another interesting observation is that this secondary lemma is *not* a case where "Moses is being explained via Moses" Runia (1987), 112. We may note too that the transition—from the *initial observation* to the secondary lemma—is not only verbal but also thematic.

[53] This is not an isolated case. In all of the parallels to *Gig.* 6-18 (see n. 44) Philo's biblical basis is very narrow. In *Plant.*, the whole section §§ 1-139 is an elaboration of a single word in the MBL (Gen. 9:20): "planted"; in *Somn.*, the MBL (Gen. 28:12) speaks of ascending and descending angels; in *Conf.*, it is the existence of angels that explains the plural verb form in Gen. 1:26 which is introduced as an SBL to help explain the corresponding plural in the MBL (Gen.

allegory is debatable. For neither of the main elements in the interpretation "angels married daughters of humans = wicked people seek pleasures" is dependent on it: That "daughters" mean vice and passions was already the interpretation of Gen. 6:1 (*Gig.* 5), and this, coupled with the initial observation that the word "angels" denotes souls, means we are dealing with wicked souls.

We next take another kind of example. In the *De virtutibus* (part of the *Exposition of the Law*) Philo discusses the nobility of birth (εὐγενεία) in §§ 187-227. He says it is not hereditary but depends on acquisition (§198) and illustrates this through biblical examples. Adam's nobility was peerless, but it did not prevent the transgression which Philo in §§ 203-205 describes replacing the scriptural details with something else:

> *Virt.* 205: [H]e eagerly chose the false, shameful and evil things (τὰ κακά) disregarding those that are good and excellent and true, on which account he fittingly exchanged (ἀνθυπ-ηλλάξατο) an immortal life (βίον) for a mortal one and, forfeiting (σφαλείς) blessedness and happiness (εὐδαιμονίας), promptly changed (μετέβαλεν) to an arduous (ἐπίπονον) and unfortunate (κακοδαίμονα) existence.[54]
>
> Cf. *Ti.* 42bc: And he that has lived his appointed time well shall return again to his abode in his native star, and shall gain a life (βίον) that is blessed (εὐδαίμονα) and congenial, but whoso has failed (σφαλείς) therein shall be changed (μεταβαλοῖ) into woman's nature at the second birth; and if, in that shape, he still refraineth not from wickedness (κακίας) he shall be changed (μεταβαλοῖ) every time, according to the nature of his wickedness (κακύνοιτο), into some bestial form after the similitude of his own nature; nor in his changings shall he cease (ἀλλάττων) from woes (πόνων) until . . .

We can note four main differences from the example in *Gig.*: there is now thematic similarity between Philo's biblical base text and Plato, there is no explicit interpretation but rather retelling, only one dialogue is utilized, and, rather than Platonic expressions recognizable as such, this is a case of an accumulation of individual words.[55] In each case, the dire consequences of an initial, ethically unsuccessful incarnation are depicted.[56] Given Philo's endorsement of reincarnation, it seems he wants to subtly remind his audience of it.

The last example concerns the utilization of a dialogue as a whole. As we saw above, when it comes to the soul and its fate, the *Phaedo* is very important for Philo. But given that most of Philo's allegories are in one way or the other related to the soul, we could expect a higher overall ranking for the dialogue.[57] Admittedly, Plato discusses the soul in other dialogues as well, but, in my

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11:7); finally in *QG* 4.188 it is the "game" Isaac played with Rebecca in Gen. 26:8 that leads Philo's mind to "festive enjoyments of the perfect," enjoyed also during and after their incarnation. I find it strained to think the Platonic scheme is inherent in these verses; Philo is rather using every opportunity to present it to his audience.

[54] Tr. Wilson (2010), 86 with some emendations.

[55] To my knowledge, the connection between these passages has not been noted in previous scholarship. Although the clearest, it is not the only link between what Philo says about the first man in *Virt.* and what Plato says in *Ti.* In §204 Philo states,

> …his father (πατήρ) was no mortal but the eternal God (ὁ ἀίδιος θεός), whose image he was in a sense, in virtue of the ruling mind within the soul (τὸν ἡγεμόνα νοῦν ἐν ψυχῇ). Yet though he should have followed (ἐπακολουθήσαντα) as far as he could in the steps of his Parent's (τοῦ γεννήσαντος) virtues . . .

Compare *Ti.* 37c: "the Father that engendered [the Soul of the world] (ὁ γεννήσας πατήρ) perceived it in motion and alive, a thing of joy to the eternal gods (τῶν ἀιδίων θεῶν)," and 41c: "Now so much of [the mortal creatures] as it is proper to designate 'immortal,' the part we call divine which rules (ἡγεμονοῦν) supremely in those who are fain to follow (ἕπεσθαι) justice always and yourselves . . ."

[56] Philo again repeats a scheme, now that of exchanging happy immortality for unhappy mortality, in discussing different biblical verses (but now the scheme itself is not Platonic). The most important parallels are *Opif.* 151-152 (see Runia [2001], 359), *Leg.* 3.52 (see Yli-Karjanmaa [2016]), *Plant.* 37 and *QG* 1.45.

[57] The words ψυχή and νοῦς alone make up 0.6% of Philo's Greek *oeuvre*.

view, the significance of the *Phaedo* for Philo has not yet been fully uncovered. Its importance does not lie in the narrative of Socrates' last moments or in proving the soul's immortality—such a basic belief needed for Philo no proof. But there are a number of Phaedonic ideas in Philo's treatises which are fundamental for the Alexandrian's basic ethos.[58]

In *Gig.* we already encountered the concept of philosophizing rightly which Philo uses many times.[59] In the *Phaedo* it is thrice combined with practising death, which appears also independently in the dialogue.[60] Philo too uses the combination to describe the upward journey of the God-seeking soul in which both correct ideas and correct actions play an important role.[61] The fundamental idea of Philo's ethics is for the soul to orientate away from the sense-perceptible towards to the noetic, or, as Socrates puts it in the *Phaedo*, from "visible" to "invisible."[62]

We can also discern in Philo Phaedonic themes that can be broadly grouped under anthropology.[63] The deceitfulness of the senses is one.[64] However, quite often he gives it a slightly un-Platonic slant: the senses are actually prone to *be deceived*, and once that happens, they drag the mind with them.[65] Cf. Gen. 3:13 where Eve (allegorized as sense-perception) says that the serpent (pleasure), "deceived me".[66] In the *Phaedo* this theme is linked with soul's identification with the body: "each pleasure or pain nails [the soul] as with a nail to the body," and such a soul "can never depart in purity to the other world, but must always go away contaminated with the body," eventually reincarnated.[67] In a few Philonic passages an intriguingly similar thought is expressed. E.g., those who manage to "quit the earthly region . . . [are] carrying in their train no bodily deficiencies," while for the wicked soul (apparently in the afterlife) it applies that "the evils with which it has grown up [are] in a certain sense its members and grow together with it."[68]

To summarize Philo's use of Plato's texts: Three major themes come together in the *Timaeus*: the two levels of reality, the creation of the lower in accordance with the higher and the structure and

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[58] Some of these are discussed in more detail in Yli-Karjanmaa (2015), esp. 122-24 and 150-52.

[59] *Phd.* 64a, 67de, 69d, 80e, 82c (also *Phdr.* 249a and *Ep. 7* 326a): see *Gig.* 14, *Deus* 22, *Agr.* 104, *Plant.* 24, *Decal.* 58 and *Spec.* 1.32.

[60] *Phd.* 64a, 67e, 80e, and 65ac, 66a, 67ad, 81a, respectively.

[61] *Gig.* 14, *Plant.* 24-25. In both, clear echoes of the *Phaedrus* are also present. Philo refers to the practice of death in different ways: he may alter the vocabulary but keep the idea (*Leg.* 1.103, *Det.* 49, *Conf.*82) or keep Plato's wording but give it a different meaning (*Det.* 34, *QG* 4.173). These correspond to the different conceptions of *life* to which one *dies to*: the body-oriented life (the first three); the physical life more generally (*Det.*) or that of virtue (*QG*).

[62] E.g., 79ab.

[63] In addition, terminological influence of the *Phaedo* can be seen in Philo's frequently defining death as the separation of soul from body using the verbs χωρίζω and διαζεύγνυμι and their cognates (67cd, 88b; also *R.* 609d, *Ep. 7* 335a; cf. *Leg.* 1.105, 2.77; *Plant.* 25, *Fug.* 55, *Abr.* 258, *Virt.* 76). Philo is the first to use Plato's adjective "body-loving" (φιλοσώματος, 68b; twelve occurrences in Philo). Furthermore, Socrates repeatedly refers to reincarnation in the *Phaedo* using either the combination of πάλιν with γίγνομαι/γένεσις or the verb ἀναβιώσκομαι (70cd, 72a, 113a, and 71e, 72ad, respectively). I have concluded that in two out of Philo's four fairly explicit approvals of the doctrine these have served as models, and in one of them Socrates' juxtaposition of sleep and death is also significant. The passages are *Cher.* 114 (παλιγγενεσία) and fr. 7.3 Harris (ἀναβίωσις with the combination of sleep and death, for which see esp. *Phd.* 71c). See Yli-Karjanmaa (2015), 150-67 and 202-5.

[64] *Phd.* 83a; cf. *Conf.* 126, *Spec.* 4.188.

[65] *Gig.* 18, *Ebr.* 46.

[66] *Opif.* 165-166, *Leg.* 3.59-68, *QG* 1.46-47.

[67] *Phd.* 83d, 81ac.

[68] *Det.* 27, *QG* 2.61. There is some evidence to suggest that in Philo the elimination of the "bodily" parts of the soul may be a prerequisite of salvation; see Yli-Karjanmaa (2015), 85-90. This idea also bears some resemblance to the notion of "double death" (mentioned by Plutarch in connection with Xenocrates' ideas in *De facie* 943a ff.) whereby the soul is first separated from the body and then the mind from the soul.

the journey of the soul. These Philo adopts, and adapts to his exegetical purposes, drawing heavily also on the account of the fall and rise of the soul in the *Phaedrus* as well as the overarching ethos of orientation away from the bodily sphere in order to permanently reach the intelligible one in the *Phaedo*.

III. Conclusion

It has been said that for Philo the Middle Platonism of Alexandria and his ancestral faith "were two ways of expressing a single vision of truth."[69] But as the examples above have aimed to show, the (sacred and inviolate) biblical text is Philo's *explanandum*, and what the *explanatio* to a large degree consists of are Platonic expressions and ideas as well as their Platonist developments. The process of allegorical interpretation gives Philo much freedom; we have seen how narrow a biblical basis he sometimes needs and how he offers the same scheme as the interpretation of entirely different verses. The singleness of the vision is only the end result of the process, and in analyzing its contents it is reasonable to lay more weight on what the biblical text *ends up meaning* than on Philo's professed allegiance to its letter.[70] And we are not just dealing with individual interpretations but a whole worldview with its two levels, the earthly and the heavenly.

Describing Philo's Moses as "a great Middle Platonist" thus seems fairly accurate.[71] But would Philo himself say he was only "borrowing back" what the Greek philosophers had taken from Moses?[72] Given the statements to this effect by Philo's predecessor Aristobulus more than a century and a half before him and the echoes found in Philo himself, it may have been a Jewish convention to profess such a view.[73] Yet in Philo's exegetical praxis its significance in relation to Plato is negligible.

Philo was a loyal Jew committed Jewish customs, and he denounced those who forsook the literal interpretation of the Mosaic law in favor of the allegorical—even if his criticism is rather mild and perhaps primarily aims at securing the social acceptability of practicing allegory.[74] There is no reason to posit a contradiction between the specifically Jewish characteristics in Philo's endeavor, such as the spirit of a personal relationship with God or the importance of God's grace for salvation, and the incorporation of his favorite philosophical ideas into the allegories. He was both a Jew and a Platonist, the former by birth, the latter, by choice.

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[69] Sterling (1993), 111.

[70] An example of the latter is, "you will not find a single pointless expression" by Moses (*Leg.* 3.147). Cf. Runia (1986), 328, regarding *Det.* 79-90 and *Plant.* 16-22, passages which

> show Philo at the peak of his powers. The role which Plato's doctrine of man, as presented in the *Timaeus*, plays in Philo's thought is revealed with more than usual clarity. In order to show man's exceptional place in the structure of the cosmos, Philo *centres his account* around the two primary anthropological passages of the Mosaic creation story. But in his endeavour to *explain what these texts actually tell us* about man's nature he resorts to the two Platonic accounts of man which he knew best, the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus* myth.

(Emphasis original.) Granted, Runia speaks of "*more than usual* clarity," but this applies to the *degree* to which the role of Plato's doctrine is *revealed*.

[71] See above, n. 18.

[72] So Dillon (1993), 152; cf. (1996), 143, 148-49.

[73] E.g., "It seems to me that Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato with great care follow [Moses] in all respects" (Aristobulus, fr. 4 in Charlesworth (2009), 2.839 = fr. 2 in the TLG, preserved by Eusebius in *Praep. ev.*13.12.4.) For similar statements in Philo, see, e.g., *Leg.* 1.108 (Heraclitus), *Prob.* 59 (Zeno).

[74] *Migr.* 86-94.

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